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ABSTRACT

Whereas the locus of understanding in internalism lies in the knowing subject, externalist models of justification readily accept knowledge claims on the basis of expert testimony or appeals to authority. This paper does not challenge the general legitimacy of externalist arguments outlining the sometimes impractical consequences of holding an inflexible internalist view, but it argues that internalism should be adopted as an ethic in literacy education to protect the intellectual autonomy of learners. Internalism promotes the intellectual autonomy of students by positioning them as subjects rather than objects in generating knowledge, and by encouraging them to evaluate critically truth claims in discourse. Language arts teachers can promote intellectual autonomy in students by encouraging them to evaluate truth claims in text, and by viewing students as participants in creating knowledge rather than as depositories for pre-existing information. Contains 21 references. (NKA)

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Running head: INTERNALISM AND CRITICAL LITERACY

Epistemic Internalism and Critical Literacy:

A Path to Student Autonomy

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Introduction

All individuals inherit a language and are influenced by the cultural artifacts it carries. They learn to name the world with descriptive symbols and entire discourses that they themselves did not create. As they learn and employ a pre-existing discourse, the accompanying values, assumptions and social values it entails are also transmitted. As Lankshear and McLaren (1993) explain, learning to read and write exposes students to an array of cultural beliefs and values that construct their personal identities and influence their world view:

> It is through the medium of language that biological human life becomes social (cultural, economic and so on) life: that is, life is organized into some form or shape and within which human identities emerge. Meaning, and hence being and subjectivity, are constituted within and through discourse (p. 10).

Literacy education is never practiced in ahistorical neutral circumstances, but always in contexts where there is unequal access to social, economic and political power. These existing social inequalities are often reified through dominant discourses that naturalize or otherwise validate the conditions from which they evolve.

Expressing his concern over the role education plays in perpetuating social injustice, Henry Giroux (as cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996) contends that, "At the core of radical pedagogy must be the aim of empowering people to work for change in the social, political and economic structure that constitutes the source of class-based power and domination" (p. 254). One of the current challenges confronting literacy educators wishing to correct social imbalances, then, is developing techniques to counteract the discourses that edify them. Unfortunately, the value of epistemology in assisting teachers and students to challenge

discourses that naturalize social injustice has been largely ignored in literacy education. As I hope to demonstrate, when teachers and students gain a greater appreciation of epistemic issues, they are better positioned to critique effectively the presuppositions, values and assumptions within discourse that perpetuate social inequality.

An internalist epistemology encourages students to examine critically the discourses they encounter, rather than passively accept them on the basis of authority opinion or expert testimony. Internalism fosters discourse critique because the student is placed in a position of epistemic responsibility, rather than epistemic dependence. Instead of relying on appeals to authority or expert testimony, an epistemically responsible student grapples with the evidence supporting the truth claim in question.

Whereas the locus of understanding in internalism lies in the knowing subject, externalist models of justification readily accept knowledge claims on the basis of expert testimony or appeals to authority. Externalists such as John Hardwig (1985) view epistemic dependence as inevitable, pointing out that in all forms of scholarly research, reliance on expert testimony plays an indispensable role in the accumulation of knowledge:

> . . . we can see how dependence on other experts pervades any complex field of research when we recognize that most footnotes that cite references are appeals to authority . . . in many cases within the pursuit of knowledge, there is clearly a complex network of appeals to the authority of various experts, and the resulting knowledge could not have been achieved by any one person (p. 348).

As Hardwig suggests, much of our accumulated knowledge rests on that gained by antecedent others. The most sophisticated scientific experiments such as those in nuclear physics are carried out by researchers who are directly indebted to their predecessors. But the habitual reliance on

expert testimony and appeals to authority for shaping one's views may also create an epistemic dependence on such sources, a situation that threatens the intellectual autonomy, self-determination and humanization of the student.

In this paper, I do not challenge the general legitimacy of externalist arguments outlining the sometimes impractical consequences of holding an inflexible internalist view. I merely argue that internalism should be adopted as an ethic[1] in literacy education to protect the intellectual autonomy of learners. Internalism promotes the intellectual autonomy of students by positioning them as subjects rather than objects in generating knowledge, and by encouraging them to evaluate critically truth claims in discourse. Finally, I suggest that language arts teachers can promote intellectual autonomy in students by encouraging them to evaluate truth claims in text, and by viewing students as participants in creating knowledge rather than as depositories for pre-existing information.

Internalist and Externalist Models of Justification

Internalist justification requires that three necessary conditions be satisfied before a proposition qualifies as knowledge. As Barrow and Milburn (1990) explain, "To know in the propositional sense is generally taken to mean: (a) having a belief; (b) that the belief is true; and (c) that one has adequate evidence for the belief "(p. 165). Simply stated, then, for an individual *p* to claim knowledge of a proposition *q*, *p* must satisfy the sufficient condition of justified true belief. A person can hold a justified belief, e.g., I erroneously believe my car keys are on the

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[1]I employ the term "ethic" because I consider internalism to be a desirable intellectual disposition that enhances the general well-being of students by promoting their autonomy and humanization.

night stand because that is where I left them, or a true belief, e.g., I fortuitously, but nevertheless correctly, predict tomorrow's weather without either belief satisfying the internalist criteria for knowledge.

Although externalism accepts that a given proposition must be believed and true to qualify as knowledge, it disagrees fundamentally with the internalist view on justification. Internalism requires q to be internally justified by p, if p claims knowledge of q. Thus, for internalists, the knowing subject supplies the necessary connection between the belief and truth conditions, typically by providing a subjective account of the relevant evidence supporting the proposition. From the internalist viewpoint, then, it is impermissible to support a belief on the basis of an appeal to authority, e.g., abortion is wrong because the Pope says so. Externalists, on the other hand, permit justification of q on the basis of expert testimony or appeals to authority, and in fact view this form of justification as often preferable. John Hardwig, for example, suggests that rationality occasionally demands the kind of epistemic deference present in the externalist view: ". . . rationality sometimes consists in deferring to epistemic authority and consequently, in passively and uncritically accepting what we are given to believe . . ." (p. 343). In effect, externalists eliminate the internalist distinction between knowledge and true belief, and therefore must accept that any true belief, even a fortuitous one, counts as knowledge.

Regardless of one's position on epistemic justification, the belief condition provides the initial requirement in both internalist and externalist accounts of knowledge. According to Bertrand Russell (1993), a belief is simply "that way of being conscious [of a proposition] which may be either true or false" (p. 256). The belief condition, then, requires that anyone claiming to

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know q must believe q, an ostensibly, but not entirely, unproblematic contention.[2] Nevertheless, p must be psychologically connected in some way to q. Thus, beliefs provide the antecedent conscious states essential to knowledge by fulfilling the required psychological connection between the knowing subject and the proposition.

Belief states provide the initial necessary condition for claiming knowledge of a proposition, but they do not provide a sufficient condition. For a proposition to qualify as knowledge it must also of course satisfy the truth condition. In other words, it is a necessary condition of p knowing q, that q is true. An individual may believe that she is Mary Queen of Scots reincarnated, but in the absence of verification, such a belief obviously fails to count as knowledge. Although the truth condition is uncontroversial as a requirement in validating knowledge claims, the explication of what counts as truth is a matter of significant philosophical contention. The *Correspondence Theory of Truth,*[3] (as cited in Boyd, 1991) with its Tarksian bi-conditionals, e.g., snow is white if and only if snow is white is potentially undermined by the missing analysis of what it means for a belief to correspond with reality. As Richard Boyd points out, ". . . for many philosophers and logicians the notion of correspondence with reality has

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[2]It is worth pointing out that there are fundamental philosophical disagreements over whether belief states are incontestable psychological conditions of human experience. Gilbert Ryle maintained that words describing mental processes were not denoting psychological activities of the mind. In fact, according to Ryle, they do not denote anything at all. He argues that, "'believe' is a tendency verb [rather than a mental state] and one that does not connote that anything is brought off or got right". Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, (Penguin Books, 1990), p.128.

[3]In 1935, Alfred Tarski published a paper that made a major contribution to metaphysics and the philosophy of language by proposing a definition of truth for natural and formal languages. The conception of truth that formed the basis of his analysis is referred to as the *Correspondence Theory of Truth*. Within this theory, what makes a sentence true or false is whether or not it corresponds to the facts or corresponds with reality.

seemed to be an example of dubious metaphysical speculation" (p. 16). In spite of this difficulty, the truth condition remains a required element in any coherent account of what propositions qualify as knowledge. Thus, for the purpose of exposition, it suffices to say that *q* is the case, i.e., the proposition *q* is true, if and only if *q* is the case. On that much, internalists and externalists agree.

Externalist Critiques of Internalism

From the internalist point of view, then, the evidence that provides justification for *p* believing *q* cannot be based on an appeal to authority or on expert testimony, but must be a function of the knowing subject *p*'s own understanding of the truth bridge connecting the knowledge and belief conditions. Externalists can respond, however, by pointing out that most successful forms of knowledge are actually based on appeals to authority. In fact, when the range and complexity of knowledge is considered, the internalist position appears increasingly untenable. The dictates of practical necessity require that individuals must sometimes rely on knowledge possessed by others:

> The general justification of epistemic authority is based on the fact that people are unequal in ability, some being more capable intellectually than others; the fact that some people know more than others; the fact that some data are available only to certain persons who are appropriately located in space and time; and the fact that there is so much that can be known that no on can know it all. Reliance on authority is a way in which knowledge can be transmitted and shared so that more people may use this knowledge than would otherwise be the case (De George, 1985, p. 38).

Individuals regularly employ the services of doctors, lawyers or chartered accountants because

they believe doing so will provide some likely benefit to their lives. Further, individuals always hold more beliefs - some of which may have significant instrumental value - than those for which they can provide evidence, and expecting all beliefs to be internally justified has a paralyzing impact on increasing one's knowledge pool. Since it is practically impossible to understand the evidential basis for all knowledge claims, individuals pragmatically adopt and maximize true beliefs based on the understanding and judgement of others.

Externalists correctly point out that experts are typically better situated to evaluate truth claims within their respective domains than lay persons. If the pilot of a commercial airliner advises passengers to fasten their seatbelts because of expected turbulence, it makes no rational sense to question the evidence for the pilot's belief that flying conditions will deteriorate. Obviously, regardless of one's epistemic orientation, the rational decision in this case is simply to fasten one's seatbelt. In instances where the potential instrumental advantage is clear and immediate, rationality requires compliance rather than internal justification, epistemic deference rather than epistemic judgement. Indeed, as Hardwig suggests, in such situations it is arguably irrational to question expert testimony.

Under certain conditions, however, Hardwig seemingly advocates a level of epistemic deference that places the knowing subject in a dubious state of complete epistemic dependence. As a result, the subject is virtually deprived of any significant role in judging knowledge claims from experts, or even in evaluating what constitutes expert testimony. In his challenge to internalism, Hardwig turns Kant's Enlightenment phrase, *Aude Sapere*[4] on its head by arguing

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[4]Kant's phrase roughly translated from Latin challenges us: Dare to be wise by having the courage to think for ourselves.

that "because the layman is the epistemic inferior to the expert, rationality sometimes consists in refusing to think for oneself" (p. 336). Hardwig argues that in many cases lay persons simply lack the requisite training or skill to evaluate truth claims made by experts, and *ipso facto* internalism becomes impossible. Clearly, the physicist's claim for the existence of neutrinos or other sub-atomic particles is one that most individuals are in no position to evaluate effectively. Knowledge claims emerging from other highly technical fields would also appear immune to lay person evaluation or critique.

Individuals living within a society and working within a domain derive significant benefit from sharing knowledge accumulated by the communities in which they live and work. Indeed, there is a deeply embedded and fundamental reliance on community knowledge. Some deference to epistemic authority, then, follows from the recognition that different individuals possess different kinds of knowledge, and all individuals stand to gain by sharing what they know. The sharing of practical knowledge seems especially important in an age when the volume of available information is expanding at an ever increasing rate. Thus, the externalist charge that a rigidly circumscribed internalism fails to appreciate the general utility of shared community knowledge appears justified.

Passengers stand to gain tremendous instrumental advantage by relying on a pilot's training and expertise to fly a commercial aircraft successfully, and advise them of behaviours, i.e., fastening of seatbelts, that ensure a safe arrival at their destination. Similarly, when our television fails to operate and we take it to a repair person, we do not require, nor would we likely understand, a complete explanation of its electronic functioning or cause for failure. Instead, we rely on the repair person's expertise within her field of knowledge, and more often

than not our trust is not misplaced. As externalism maintains, relying on the expertise and accumulated knowledge of others is a necessary component of modern social life, a fact that even internalists seemingly must admit.

The Internalist Response to Externalist Critique

Externalists are justified in pointing to the plethora of situations where rationality requires a certain measure of epistemic deference on behalf of the knowing subject. But trusting the judgement of another within contexts that potentially offer some immediate or potential benefit to the subject need not entail, as Hardwig proposes, a "refusal to think for oneself". In an intellectually autonomous person, the decision to defer to expert testimony remains a function of internal judgement. As Richard Foley (1994) points out, situations of epistemic deference do not automatically subvert the intellectual autonomy of subjects because the "epistemic egoist", analogous to the ethical egoist, can perfectly justify periodic deference to epistemic authority: "Epistemic egoists who want to grant derivative authority to others are in a position analogous to ethical egoists who promote the interests of others, since doing so might have instrumental value for them" (p. 56). Thus, protecting intellectual autonomy does not require an unbending internalist model of justification where no belief is accepted as knowledge without a subjective understanding of the relevant evidence connecting the belief and truth conditions. As we have seen, such a position is often impractical, largely untenable and even irrational within certain contexts.

Although Hardwig correctly points out that in some cases accepting expert testimony is rationally justified or even required, such acceptance need not amount to "refusing to think for

oneself", where not thinking for oneself means a total absence of evaluation or judgement on behalf of the subject. Rather, it is precisely by thinking for themselves that individuals can rationally determine when to accept another's knowledge claim without relinquishing their intellectual autonomy. By judging that other people hold an epistemically superior position, and by considering their personal stake within a given situation, they can justifiably, rationally and autonomously defer to another's belief. It is the critical evaluation of existing conditions that leads the internalist to defer to the beliefs of others, however, and not a chronic, unreflective dependence on epistemic authority. When appropriately employed, it is still reason, the great arbitrator of belief, that distinguishes between situations where an internalist should defer, and those cases where valid questions concerning knowledge claims can be legitimately raised.

The principal pedagogical concern with external justification is that it may undermine the intellectual autonomy of students by habituating them to a state of epistemic dependence. A chronic state of dependence on authority opinion can develop in students when they rely entirely on the views of others to formulate their own beliefs. An epistemically dependent person's habitual deference to epistemic authority may reduce her to little more than a repository for externally generated information. Further, without possessing the inclination to examine critically the evidence for the truth claims encountered, epistemically dependent students become easy targets for ideological control.

Those individuals lacking all inclination to evaluate truth claims made by others may also display an epistemic instability in the beliefs they hold as true. Without the disposition to evaluate truth claims, individuals may quickly position themselves on issues like abortion or assisted suicide by relying on the testimony of religious leaders or other authority figures, rather

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than grappling with the complex nature of difficult moral judgements. John S. Mill (1956), the 19th century British philosopher, describes the sometimes turbulent viewpoints of epistemically dependent persons:

> There is a class of persons who think it enough if a person asserts undoubtingly to what they think true, though he has no knowledge whatever of the grounds of the opinion, and could not make a tenable defence of it against superficial objections. . . They make it nearly impossible for the received opinion to be rejected wisely and considerately, though it still may be rejected rashly and ignorantly . . . beliefs not grounded on conviction are apt to give way before the slightest semblance of an argument (p. 43).

If Mill is correct, since epistemically dependent people form their beliefs entirely on the basis of appeals to authority or expert opinion, they may mindlessly change their views when a new authority or expert advances a different position. These individuals may cling to their beliefs dogmatically or change them unreflectively because they lack any inclination to formulate intellectually grounded beliefs on the basis of critical analysis and reflection.

Externalist arguments fail to reflect the view that what is often deemed knowledge is actually socially constructed, and the construction of knowledge in this fashion relates directly to social authority and political power.[5] Although De George is largely sympathetic to internalist concerns, he surprisingly downplays the role of politics and ideology in establishing epistemic

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[5]So as not to ride roughshod over important philosophical differences, I am compelled at this point to distinguish between knowledge *per se*, and how social forces influence knowledge claims. Barrow and Milburn explain this important distinction: "It is necessary to distinguish between epistemological theses and sociological theses. Social forces cannot have effects on knowledge itself, in the sense of the nature of knowledge, anymore than they can on God himself . . . There are certain philosophical theses that look superficially like attempts to assert the position that everything [all knowledge] is a matter of opinion. Such views are to be sharply distinguished from sociological theses to the effect that what we claim to know, what knowledge we value, and what we choose to advance knowledge of, may be or are in various ways affected by social or cultural factors." (p. 166).

authority. He believes, for example, that overestimating the importance of political authority in evaluating knowledge may negatively affect one's ability to judge knowledge claims outside spheres of political influence:

> Authority is typically and mistakenly equated with political authority. Assuming political authority as the paradigm with which one begins makes it difficult to provide the conceptual apparatus adequate for rationally evaluating and resolving conflicts that involve various kinds of authority in such realms as education, religion and the family (p. 1).

In fairness to De George's view, knowledge claims from epistemic authorities need not entail ideological interests. His contention, however, that knowledge claims emerging from education and religious institutions can be evaluated effectively outside ideological considerations appears somewhat problematic. If the function of schools as ideological institutions aimed at social reproduction is ignored, it becomes difficult to evaluate effectively the knowledge claims in education policy and curriculum documents.

Within the realm of education, politics and ideology are intrinsically connected to pedagogical practice and to schools as institutions of social reproduction. Supporting this view, Louis Althusser (1973) argues that education, filling the role previously played by the church, has becomes the primary state apparatus to promote the interests of the prevailing hegemony. The current truth claim advanced by many education experts, for example, that schools must be more sensitive to the needs of business, cannot be evaluated properly without some appreciation of how various ideological forces impinge on education policy. Indeed, educational institutions offer a near perfect means for ideological control because they provide hegemonic interests with an all encompassing and rudimentary method of social indoctrination. To advance the primary

hegemonic goal of social reproduction schools can disempower students by encouraging the uncritical acceptance of the prevailing discourse, and the socio-economic conditions from which it evolves.

The view that certain forms of knowledge exist objectively outside political influence is subject to a range of other epistemological critiques. Feminist epistemologies challenge universal claims to truth by validating difference and raising important concerns over who determines what forms of knowledge are socially accepted, and what methods of discernment should be employed. As Helen Longino (1993) observes, " . . . to the extent we speak of knowledge, it is partial and fragmentary. The requirement that demonstrability be secured by intersubjective criticism has the consequence that knowledge is constituted by the interaction of opposing styles and/or points of view" (p. 270). Thus, the human practices, ideas, concepts, beliefs, values and politics that determine what knowledge becomes socially validated are subject to continual evaluation and revision, a feature of knowledge about which students should be made aware.[6]

According to some constructivists, regardless of the field from which it emerges, knowledge cannot be viewed as absolute, but comprises a transitional belief system as part of a cultural framework:

> . . . by and large, human knowledge, and the criteria and methods

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[6]I do not adopt the strong constructivist claim that all knowledge is constructed. Indeed, there are a number of knowledge claims that appear incontrovertible, i.e., the law of non-contradiction or ~ (p ^ ~p), and other analytic truths. Further, the conditions of knowledge referred to in epistemology, namely justified true belief, remain intact regardless of what beliefs become socially validated or culturally constructed as knowledge. Radical constructivist claims also seemingly ignore the fundamental intersubjective elements of human experience, i.e. conceptual frameworks and language, that determine the validity of beliefs.

> we use in our inquiries, are all constructed. Furthermore, the bodies of knowledge available to the growing learner are themselves human constructs - physics, biology, sociology, and even philosophy are not disciplines the content of which was handed down, ready formed, from on high; scholars have laboured mightily over the generations to construct the content of these fields, and no doubt "internal politics" has played some role. Thus, in sum, human knowledge - whether it be the bodies of public knowledge known as the various disciplines, or the cognitive structures of individual knowers or learners - is constructed (Phillips, p. 5).

From this perspective, then, science is socially constructed in the sense that the agreement of a theory with the operational traditions of a discipline, and with the social interests of the scientific community, determine its acceptance or rejection.

Unfortunately, the more radical contructivist theses devolve into epistemological relativism, a view that ignores the fact "that nature exerts considerable constraint over our knowledge-constructing activities" (Barrow & Milburn, 1990, p. 12). But the more moderate, reasonable constructivist arguments fuel internalist concerns about epistemic dependence. As Barrow and Milburn point out, "the weaker [constructivist] thesis that what we chose to regard as worthwhile knowledge (particularly in the context of schooling), what we are capable of understanding, and what we can regard as adequate or relevant evidence in various matters, are to some extent affected by time and place, is eminently reasonable" (p. 166). There are good reasons, then, to suspect that in some cases so-called expert testimony advances forms of knowledge that protect the interests of some, and simultaneously undermine the interests of others. If knowledge claims are sometimes a function of social forces that may disempower or control students, then the intellectual autonomy fostered by internalism provides an imperative countermeasure to protect students from knowledge claims that may subvert their interests.

Depending on expert testimony as a means to maximize true beliefs may not always be quite as straightforward as externalists would hope. Indeed, expert testimony is often fallible, and experts within a given field of inquiry often disagree among themselves. Before its devastating side effects were discovered, for example, DDT was hailed by many experts as a miracle cure for pest control. Current debates on the safety of nuclear energy often find experts positioned differently on whether new reactors should be built, or on how spent fuel rods should be stored. In such cases, one confronts the situation of evaluating expert testimony, rather than actual knowledge claims. But if an expert's reliability is determined by the knowledge she purportedly possesses within her domain, then the determination of expertise becomes based on credentials bestowed by other experts within that field. The problem with this method of discernment, however, is that the credibility of those bestowing the credentials is also subject to evaluation. Thus, when attempting to settle disputes between experts, the criteria for deciding which expert should be believed is problematic because it relies on others *ad infinitum* to identify expert opinion, and consequently confronts the unsettling philosophical problem of infinite regress. [7]

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[7]I am obliged to point out that internalist justification confronts a similar difficulty. If I offer justification for a certain belief, then that justification relies on still other beliefs. Theoretically, the process continues until edified by some foundational principle, e.g., the *Verification Principle*, which is subject to further epistemic critique. William P. Aston (1989) explains: ". . . if we are to give an adequate formulation of this higher level requirement [internal justification], we must commit ourselves to some highly controversial assumption in substantive epistemology" (p. 196).

Internalism and Intellectual Autonomy

In spite of externalist attacks on its tenability, internalism remains a crucial condition in protecting the intellectual autonomy of students. As David Cooper (1993) points out, "One thinks of the attempts to distinguish education from indoctrination in terms of the [externalist] lack of concern for justification of the beliefs being transmitted to pupils" (p. 31). But a legitimate question can be raised as to why advancing intellectual autonomy is a desirable educational objective. According to Frederick Schmitt (1987), for example, the importance internalists place on intellectual autonomy is misguided because it necessarily limits the number of true beliefs an individual can hold. He suggests that internalists are preoccupied with autonomy because they incorrectly believe it reduces the opportunity for error in judgment, more so than relying on experts or appeals to authority.

There is indeed a *prima facie* case to be made that it is more important to accumulate a large number of true beliefs based on expert testimony than it is to form fewer true beliefs on the basis of one's own understanding. The potential error in such views, however, is that they presuppose there are always clearly defined ways to determine beyond a reasonable doubt what is a correct or true belief. Given constructivist concerns about the influence social forces exact on knowledge claims, the important reason to promote intellectual autonomy in education may be less about avoiding error, although that is certainly important, than it is about protecting students from ideological control, facilitating student self-determination, and encouraging social reconstruction to achieve social justice.

It is important and necessary to distinguish intellectual autonomy from mere intellectual freedom. Within a democratic society individuals should be, at least in theory, free to hold any

idea they choose. They are intellectually free in so far as they are not legally, physically or otherwise ostensibly prevented from holding any belief they desire. Just because individuals possess intellectual freedom, however, does not mean they are intellectually autonomous. Although students may be free in principle to act, think and make decisions on their own, without the disposition to act, reflect and decide for themselves, they are not intellectually autonomous. As Charles Taylor (1979) suggests, both external and internal forces of influence can threaten an agent's freedom to act autonomously:

> A man's freedom can be hemmed in by internal obstacles, as well as by external one's. You are not free if you are motivated, through fear, unauthentically internalized standards, or false consciousness to thwart your self-realization. And the internal obstacles may not just be confined to those the subject identifies (p. 183-93).

In situations where individuals defer to epistemic authority or follow prescribed guidelines established by certain ideologies, but fail to reflect on the reasons why they do so, they are not acting in an autonomous fashion. An internalist ethic of justification can help students resist unauthentic internalized standards, beliefs and values by prompting them to evaluate and justify the beliefs they hold as true. Intellectually autonomous students are responsible for their beliefs and assumptions because they conduct an on-going inquiry into the authenticity, nature and soundness of the beliefs they hold. In literacy education, intellectual autonomy requires that students be disposed to evaluate and sometimes radically criticize the views, values, and assumptions advocated through discourse.

Internalism and Humanization in Critical Literacy Education

The view that ideology masked as text supports existing social power structures, and constitutes an important mechanism for social control is one increasingly accepted by literacy scholars. Indeed, the ability to read and write may expose learners to a range of ideologically content and messages that effectively subverts their intellectual autonomy:

> Educators have become increasingly aware that, far from being a sure means to attain an accurate and "deep" understanding of the world and one's place within it, the ability to read and write may expose individuals and entire social groups to forms of domination and control by which their interests are subverted (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 386).

The model of literacy instruction employed in classrooms, then, sends implicit messages to students about social order, social power, social life and social change. In the absence of an internalist ethic, students will likely view the teacher and text as the absolute sources of truth, rather than as voices in a multi-participant dialogue about knowledge. A method of literacy education that fails to encourage challenges to text inculcates students to adopt the prevailing discourse as truth even when legitimate questions exist over its validity.

Uncritical exposure to discourse protects the existing power relations in society and reinforces the reproductive roles of schools by indoctrinating students with prevailing hegemonic views. Terry Eagleton (1991) explains how discourse practices effectively naturalize the status quo:

> . . . they [i.e. students] must believe that these injustices are inevitable or they are not really injustices at all. It [discourse] can do this either by falsifying social reality, suppressing and excluding certain unwelcome features of it, or suggesting that these features cannot be avoided . . . it may be true of the *present* system that, say, a degree of unemployment is inevitable, but not

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> of some future alternative. Ideological statements may be true to society as presently constituted, but false in so far as they serve to block off the possibility of a transformed state of affairs (p. 27).

The current discourse supporting market economy practices provides a perfect example of Eagleton's observation on how discourse can falsify social reality. The market economy principle of supply and demand is presented by experts, i.e., economists, politicians, etc., as an unavoidable fact of human life, and often granted the same ahistorical status as the law of gravity. The unemployment, class stratification and other social injustices that accompany market economy principles are also depicted as inevitable features of social life.

Phillip J. Lee, past recipient of an honourary doctorate degree from the University of New Brunwsick, recently warned graduates about the pervasive and damaging impact of the market economy discourse. Borrowing a phrase from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he told students the "time is out of joint":

> . . . you and I, we are told, we have no freedom. Because we are told day after day by a relentless barrage of information, outside of those strictures of the global market place, there are no longer any choices to be made. So, for example, we would like to have the best public school system but are told we can't afford it. We would like to have a public health care system second to none but we are told the global market will not allow it. When will a teacher in our day have the courage to say, "But wait, human beings were not made to serve the economic system. An economic system was made to serve human beings? (Allen, 1998, A1).

As Lee suggests, economic systems are not ahistorical, but merely social constructs created to serve the material needs of society. When economic systems fail to reflect the needs, aspirations and moral values of a given community, they can be, and indeed should be, transformed. The epistemic validity of market economy discourse, however, will only be challenged by students

who are inclined to question the implicit assumptions and explicit claims it contains. Only students who have acquired an internalist ethic of justification, armed with the inclination to evaluate, are intellectually equipped to challenge the market economy discourse, and the social injustice it entails.

There is no better example of how an internalist ethic of justification can epistemically and socially empower literacy students than that provided in the pedagogy of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. His unique approach to literacy education was primarily motivated by a concern to correct social injustices by making students subjects rather than objects in the act of knowing. According to Freire (1970), when students are empowered in this fashion, education shifts from mere social maintenance and reproduction toward social critique and transformation. In a model of literacy education where student inquiry is encouraged, knowledge becomes a negotiated social product that emerges from interaction with knowing others, rather than something dispensed from authorities and expert testimony.

Instead of encouraging the critical consciousness and intellectual autonomy that serve as prerequisites for personal transformation, Freire argues that traditional literacy instruction, i.e., banking education in which students are viewed as depositories for knowledge, reinforces student passivity. Students taught in the banking education method conform to the endorsed view of reality because they are denied the opportunity, and thus never develop the inclination, to evaluate truth claims in text. In the absence of an internalist ethic of justification, no textual critique occurs because learners are habituated to a condition of epistemic dependence. Freire suggests that students never alerted to the fact that some knowledge is socially constructed, and that social reality is a process of transformation, become progressively dependent, alienated and

hopeless. Whereas critical literacy evokes student inquiry and critique, banking education dehumanizes students by excluding them from the reflective realm. As Freire suggests, the pedagogical approach selected can exact a profound influence on the lives of students: "Within history, in concrete objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for man as an uncompleted being conscious of his incompletion." (p. 27). According to Freire, then, chronic epistemic dependence not only precludes a transformation in the critical consciousness of students, it also alienates them from their species character.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire describes the dehumanizing consequences of denying students the opportunity to evaluate and critique the information they encounter. Habituating students to accept uncritically knowledge claims on the basis of appeals to authority or expert testimony is more than an affront to their intellectual autonomy and self-determination, it is a form of active oppression and violence:

> If men as historical beings necessarily engaged with other men in a movement of inquiry, did not control that movement, it would be (and is) a violation of men's humanity. Any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate men from their own decision making is to change them into objects (p. 73).

Regardless of the means employed, denying students the opportunity to participate in the process of inquiry and transformation is dehumanizing because by nature humans are thinking and acting beings. Of course, one way to dehumanize students and alienate them from their own decision making is by habituating them to adopt unreflectively the beliefs of authorities and experts. For the humanizing process of critical reflection and transformation to occur, literacy students require more than the simple opportunity to evaluate text. They also must be disposed to reflect

critically, a disposition that internal justification and epistemic responsibility inspires.

Freire is not alone in his belief that humanization is prevented when humans are disengaged from reflective action, or *praxis*. Aristotle (1985) also argues that *eudaemonia*, or happiness, is only achieved by humans when they fulfill their proper function. He defines proper functioning as virtue or excellence, and extends the concept beyond the realm of human activity, e.g, the excellence of an axe lies in its chopping, or that of a knife in its cutting. According to Aristotle, an object's excellence is determined by how well it performs the characteristic function for which it is designed. In the case of human beings, excellence and virtue lie in reason and reflective action, the two characteristics that most obviously distinguish us from all other living things:

> We have found, then, that the human function is the soul's activity that expresses reason [as itself having reason] or requires reason [as obeying reason]. Now we take the human function to be a certain kind of life, and take this life to be the soul's activity and actions that express reason. Hence, the excellent [virtuous and happy] man's function is to do this finely and well (p. 17).

If Aristotle is correct, in the absence of an internalist ethic of justification, a student's *eudaemonia* is apt to be thwarted because her ability to act in accordance with reason, i.e., *praxis*, is precluded by epistemic dependence. So disposed, students are denied the opportunity to pursue the excellence for which they, as human beings, are designed; namely, reflective action in the form of personal and social transformation.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have provided an account of the internalist and externalist positions on epistemic justification. I have argued that the uncritical acceptance of truth claims generated by others disempowers students by habituating them to a condition of epistemic dependence, an intellectually inert state that leaves them vulnerable to ideological control. When educated in this fashion, students come to view knowledge as something created and controlled by others, and view their own role as one of passive acceptance and compliance. If students lack the inclination to evaluate text, then conditions of social injustice edified in discourse are insulated from academic critique. Indeed, by acquiescing to prevailing viewpoints, an epistemically dependent student validates the beliefs that perpetuate social inequality. Thus, I have argued that internalism be adopted as an ethic in critical literacy education because it promotes intellectual autonomy, a necessary condition for student self-determination and social reconstruction.

A critical literacy pedagogy employing an internalist ethic of justification provides an important vehicle to transform an education system that often engenders student compliance, political passivity, and reproduces social inequality. A pedagogy concerned with social justice must provide students with the intellectual tools to transform the social, political and economic structures that facilitate class distinctions and perpetuate social injustice. Only when students are inclined to seek evidence for the knowledge claims they encounter will they possess the intellectual tools to foster social change. Thus, in the context of global economic reform and emerging pleas for improved social justice, a critical literacy that values critique, analysis, and internal justification may be of social and moral benefit to the entire global community.

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